

Kentucky Department of Education

Public Education
in Kentucky



Kentucky's

system of public education is getting results — results so positive that educators throughout the nation and the world are using it as a model for their own school improvement efforts. Five core principles support Kentucky's public education system:

- All children can learn at high levels, given adequate time, opportunity and support.
- Equity is critical.
- The school is the best place to make decisions about what happens in the school.
- High standards produce high achievement.
- Results matter



All children can learn at high levels, given adequate time, opportunity and support.

Children have different needs. They come from different backgrounds and family situations. They learn in different ways. Kentucky’s public school system responds to those differences with programs that give individual children what they need. The goal is success for every child.

How does Kentucky provide adequate opportunity for learning?

Preschool – This program serves 3- and 4-year-old children with disabilities and 4-year-old children who come from low-income families. Learning may be a challenge for these children. Through preschool, they gain basic skills that prepare them for success at school.

Primary – Kentucky’s primary program includes the levels formerly known as kindergarten and grades one, two and three. Kentucky calls on primary teachers to teach in varied ways that permit young students to learn in their own natural ways and make progress at their own rates. Kentucky wants all students to read at or above grade level by the time they leave the primary program and enter fourth grade.

Intermediate – In grades four and five, Kentucky students continue to build on what they learned in primary. Concrete, hands-on activities prepare them to understand the abstract concepts they will need to learn in middle and high school.

Middle – Kentucky’s middle-grades curriculum supports academics with developmental programs that guide students in grades six, seven and eight through this time of rapid and sometimes confusing change. During these years, schools provide many opportunities for students to build on learning in ways that connect to their own interests.

High School – Kentucky’s high school curriculum prepares students for college, technical school, the military or the workplace. Some courses give students college credits before they graduate; others give them the credentials for high-paying, in-demand technology jobs right after high school. Kentucky’s high schools strive to be every student’s springboard to the future.

How does Kentucky provide adequate time for learning?

The Extended School Services program – popularly known as ESS – provides tutoring or specialized classes before or after school, during the summer or on weekends (and in some cases during the school day). This extra time for learning is available to students who are having difficulty mastering skills and material during regular class time. The most effective programs customize these services to the needs of each child.

How does Kentucky provide adequate support for learning?

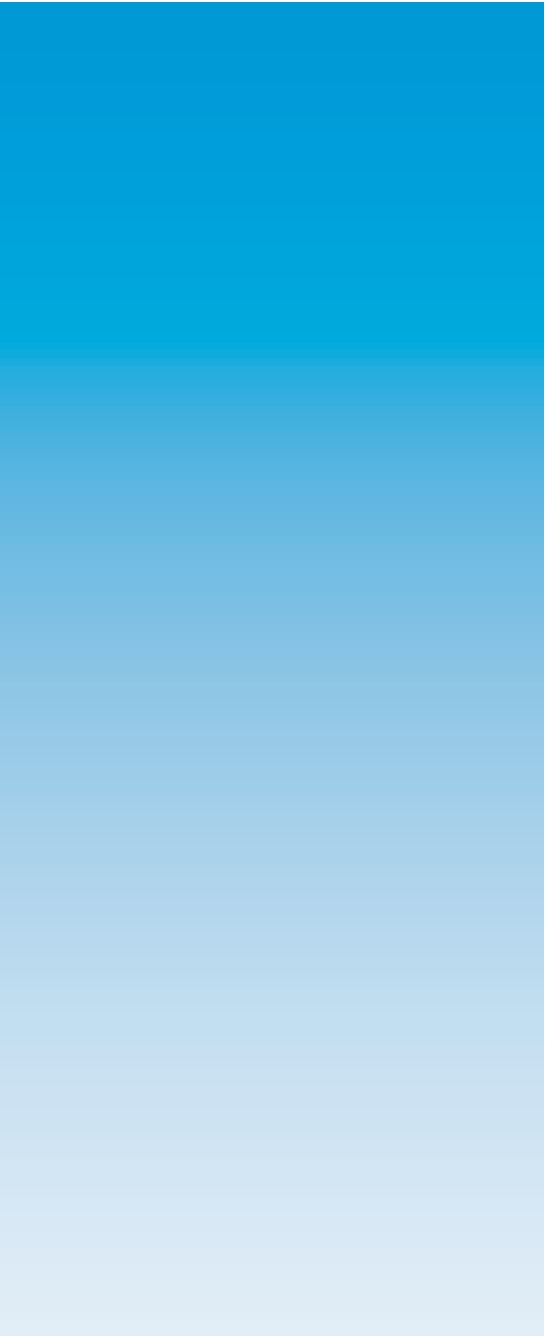
Sometimes there are health, family or social circumstances that stand between a child and academic success. Family resource centers (serving elementary schools) and youth services centers (serving middle and high schools) help students and families break through those barriers. The centers help families meet their children’s basic needs, from food, shelter and clothing to eyeglasses and medical care. They refer families to health and social services – including mental health, crisis and substance abuse counseling – and offer training in how to be effective parents. Centers serve almost every school in Kentucky.

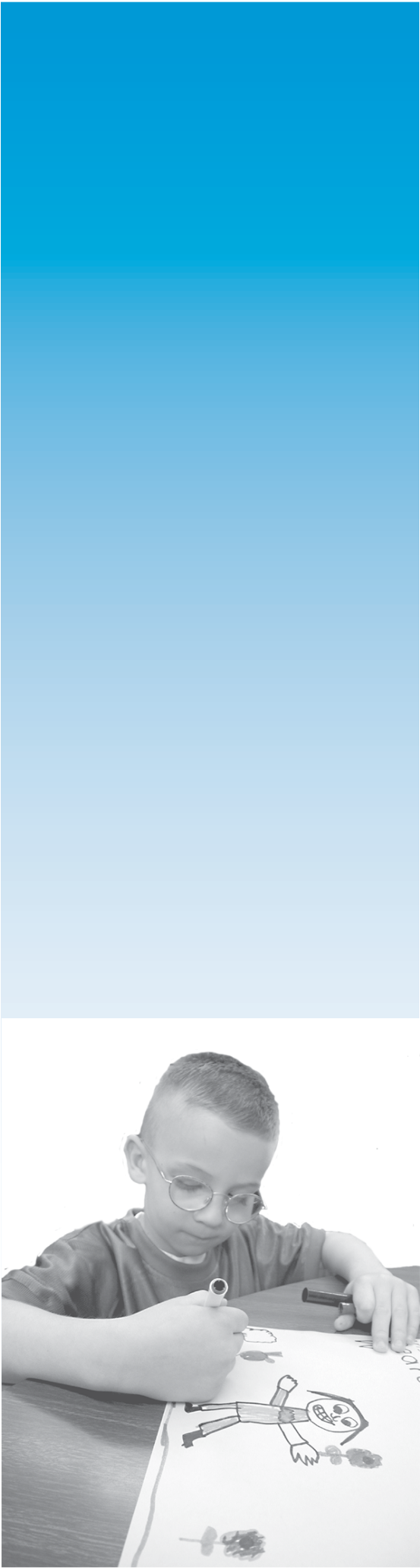
On the Web...

To read more about these education topics, go to www.kentuckyschools.org/kde/public+education+in+kentucky.htm and click on “Principle 1: All children can learn at high levels, given adequate time, opportunity and support.”

Equity is critical.

In 1990, the Kentucky Supreme Court stated that an efficient and effective public school system must provide equal educational opportunities for all children, regardless of race, gender, geographic location, diverse learning need, or the financial standing of family or community. Kentucky schools are accountable for closing achievement gaps that exist among demographic groups.





How does Kentucky ensure education equity?

Funding – Before 1990, some school districts had less money – in some cases a *lot* less money than other districts – for educating children. Those districts usually had limited opportunities to raise education money through local property taxes.

With an eye to equity, Kentucky developed a new school finance system known as SEEK (Support Education Excellence in Kentucky). SEEK encourages communities to raise what money they can locally. Then SEEK distributes state education dollars in a way that balances resources and narrows the funding gap between property-rich and property-poor school districts.

Access – Technology opens the world to all Kentucky students, no matter where they live. High-quality networked computers, high-speed Internet access, and e-mail accounts in every school give all students the same opportunities to get information from thousands of authoritative sources.

The Meaning of “All” – When Kentuckians say “all children can learn given adequate time, opportunity and support,” all means *all* – regardless of gender, race, location, learning challenge or family income. Kentucky is committed to closing achievement gaps based on gender, poverty, disability, low English proficiency, and racial/ethnic backgrounds.

On the Web...

To read more about these education topics, go to www.kentuckyschools.org/kde/public+education+in+kentucky.htm and click on “Principle 2: Equity is critical.”

The school is the best place to make decisions about what happens in the school.

Kentucky empowers teachers and parents to decide what is best for their students and how their schools will meet Kentucky’s high education standards. They make those decisions together through a process called school-based decision making.

Almost every Kentucky public school has a school-based decision making council, and every council includes parents, teachers and the principal. Each council sets policies and makes decisions in these major areas:

- Curriculum
- Instructional materials
- Budget
- Staffing
- Professional development
- Other areas that influence the learning environment and academic achievement

Parents, communities and schools are important partners in Kentucky public education. The most successful schools are those that involve parents in meaningful ways and form partnerships with local businesses, agencies and organizations.

On the Web...

To read more about school-based decision making, go to www.kentuckyschools.org/kde/public+education+in+kentucky.htm and click on “Principle 3: The school is the best place to make decisions about what happens in the school.”

High standards produce high achievement.

Kentucky has “raised the bar” in public education by expecting all schools to meet the same high standards and all students to reach for the same high goals. Those standards came from a statewide, inclusive process:

- Hundreds of educators, parents, and business and civic leaders have joined forces to decide what Kentucky wants students to know and be able to do by the time they graduate from high school. Those decisions are Kentucky’s “Academic Expectations.”
- Based on those expectations, hundreds of Kentuckians decided what teachers at every grade level should teach. The list of courses is Kentucky’s “Program of Studies for Kentucky Schools.”

- Kentucky decided which knowledge and skills in the “Program of Studies” were so important that the state would test students’ abilities in those areas every year. Those skills are listed in “Kentucky’s Core Content for Assessment.”
- Teachers representing every academic subject and grade level worked together on a scale for measuring what students know and can do with their knowledge. Kentucky’s “Student Performance Standards” have four main levels: novice, apprentice, proficient and distinguished. The standards define these levels in detail for every subject at every grade level.

Because Kentucky has clear, high standards, every school district and school and every administrator and teacher is responsible for teaching every student to the same high level. Parents, community leaders and other interested citizens now know what their local schools teach in every grade.

On the Web...

To read more about Kentucky’s education standards, go to <http://www.kentuckyschools.org/kde/public+education+in+kentucky.htm> and click on “Principle 4: High standards produce high achievement.”

Results matter.

Kentucky holds all schools to the same high standards. The only way to know if schools are meeting those standards is to measure how much their students learn.

Kentucky’s Commonwealth Accountability Testing System, or CATS, measures every school’s progress toward Kentucky’s high standards of teaching and learning. CATS rewards schools that exceed their goals and helps low-scoring schools take specific steps to improve.

How do we test?

CATS uses three tools to measure school quality and school improvement:

1. non-academic data
2. a national test of basic skills
3. Kentucky Core Content Tests

Non-academic data include attendance rates, retention rates (reflecting the number of students who must repeat a grade level), dropout rates (reflecting the number of students who leave school before earning a diploma), and information on students’ successful transition to adult life.

The national basic skills test (the CTBS/5) measures the achievement of Kentucky students in comparison to the achievement of students throughout the country.

The Kentucky Core Content Tests measure what students know and what they can do with what they know. Nationally respected testing experts and Kentucky educators work together to develop test questions that measure what Kentuckians expect students to know. They base those questions on Kentucky’s “Core Content for Assessment,” a document that lists the topics to be tested and helps teachers plan instruction.

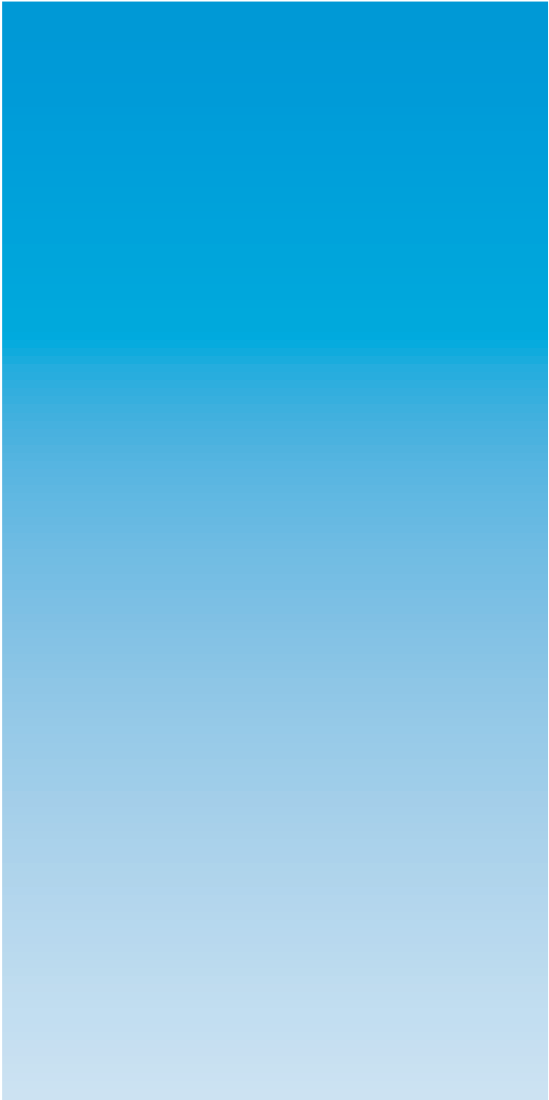
The tests measure student performance in three ways:

- multiple-choice questions
- open-response items – questions that students answer by writing short essays
- portfolios – samples of writing students do throughout the school year

When do we test?

Kentucky students take the Kentucky Core Content Tests in the spring. Schools can schedule testing during a two-week “testing window” set by the state.





What do we test?

Kentucky tests students in eight core subjects, but not every student takes every test every year.

Commonwealth Accountability Testing System What's Tested When...										
Tests	Exiting Primary	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12
Norm-Referenced Test (Reading, Math, Language Arts)	✓			✓			✓			
Reading		✓			✓			✓		
Mathematics			✓			✓			✓	
Science		✓			✓				✓	
Social Studies			✓			✓			✓	
Writing Portfolios		✓			✓					✓
Writing on Demand Prompt		✓			✓					✓
Arts and Humanities			✓			✓			✓	
Practical Living & Vocational Studies			✓			✓		✓		

What do test scores tell us?

Scores on the Kentucky Core Content Tests show us how well students are learning, how effectively teachers are teaching, and how effectively schools and districts are supporting teaching and learning.

Students’ test scores are important, but school effectiveness depends on other measures, too: dropout rates, attendance figures, retention rates (the percentage of students in grades four through twelve who repeat a grade instead of moving on to the next) and transition data (what students do after they graduate).

All of these factors become part of each school’s accountability index, a score that shows how well the school is progressing toward Kentucky’s goal of proficiency (a score of 100 or higher on a 140-point scale) by the year 2014.

Kentucky’s most successful schools and districts use all of the individual measurements plus their index scores to plan for improvement. The Kentucky Department of Education uses the data to develop the kinds of programs and supports that will help schools and districts improve.

Kentucky reports results.

Each year, every Kentucky public school publishes a “School Report Card” to keep the public informed about the school’s progress. By law, each public school must send a copy of its report card to every student’s home by mid-January.

Each school also must have on hand an annual “Expanded School Report Card.” This set of documents provides more details, including student test scores by gender, ethnicity, disability and other criteria. Each school must make its expanded report card available to anyone who requests it.

Every school district prepares its own annual “District Report Card” summarizing the performance of all schools. The district must publish this report card in a local newspaper before the second Sunday in February each year. An expanded district report card is available in the school district’s central office.

Both the school and district report cards highlight strengths and weaknesses and explain strategies for improvement. They help open the lines of communication between schools and communities,

educators and parents. If you have a child in a Kentucky public school, watch for your school’s report card each January and your school district’s report card each February.

To make informatioon about district and school progress available to everyone, the Departmtent of Education posts all school and district report cards on the Internet. To view them, go to the department’s Web site (www.kentuckyschools.org) and select “For Parents.”CATS Accountability

Every two years, schools that surpass their goals on the way to 100 on the 140-point scale – and meet other important requirements – receive reward money. A school also earns rewards each time it passes one of five recognition points (scores of 55, 66, 77, 88 and 100) or scores in the top 5 percent of schools in the state. The school council (or the principal, if there is no council) decides how to use the reward money to make the school even more successful.

Schools that fall below their goals receive assistance, which can include school improvement funding, a mandatory scholastic audit or voluntary scholastic review, and the assignment of a highly skilled educator to guide the school’s improvement process. The foundation of audits and reviews is Kentucky’s “Standards and Indicators for School Improvement,” a set of standards and characteristics that result in high-performing schools.

The Kentucky Department of Education sends special service teams to work with districts in giving schools the specific help they need to put audit recommendations into action.

These consequences for low-scoring schools have one goal: helping every school and every student reach proficiency or beyond by 2014.

On the Web...

To read more about assessment and accountability, go to [www.kentuckyschools.org/kde/public + education + in + kentucky.htm](http://www.kentuckyschools.org/kde/public+education+in+kentucky.htm) and click on “Standard 5: Results Matter.”

For More Information . . .

About an Individual School:

- Contact the school office. For a phone number, look in your local phone directory under the name of the city or county.
- Visit the Kentucky Department of Education’s Web site (www.kentuckyschools.org) and select “For Parents.”

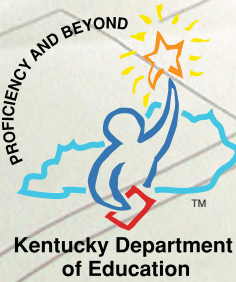
About Kentucky’s System of Public Education:

- Contact the school district office.
- Contact the Kentucky Department of Education toll free at (800) 533-5372.
- Check the Kentucky Department of Education Web site at www.kentuckyschools.org.
- Read the department’s publication “Kentucky Teacher,” online at www.kentuckyschools.org/kentuckyteacher.
- Watch “Inside Kentucky Schools,” a 30-minute video magazine produced by the Department of Education. Check KET, KET2 and local cable program listings for broadcast times.





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